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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8199
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000690

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: AOUN SAME GOALS, BUT DIFFERENT MEANS TO
ACHIEVE THEM

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Former General Michel Aoun displayed to visiting NEA A/S Welch a friendly, near collegial demeanor as he outlined his plan for disarming Hizballah and assuring Hizballah supporters in southern Lebanon that a legitimate government can keep them safe from Israel. Welch said the U.S. would not select presidential candidates, but could oppose one if he or she were allied to a terrorist group or a foreign power. Aoun explained his diffidence toward pushing for the opening of Parliament and said he endorses the special tribunal. End Summary.

AOUN DEFENDS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIZBALLAH

2. (C) In 5/16 meeting at the Embassy Residence, NEA Assistant Secretary Welch and the Ambassador received Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun, accompanied by his advisor (and son-in-law) Gebran Bassil. Aoun responded to A/S Welch's disappointment in the General's close relationship with Hizballah by giving a litany of mistakes and violations committed by the Siniora government which have led to the current impasse. He described what he called a new initiative to solve the conflicting problems of the current government. The new strategy seems to be a replay of the old methods, and still depended on his continuing good relationship with Hizballah. This relationship, he said, will help Lebanon to solve its problems.

THREE STEPS TO PEACE

3. (SBU) Aoun's plan is to integrate Hizballah into the political power, obtain guarantees that Israel is not a threat to Lebanon, and fix modalities for regional arms control. A strong government should be formed, which comprises all political parties in Lebanon, and then these three issues should be dealt with in the order he presented them. Establishing diplomatic relations with Syria will help Lebanon understand cross-border traffic of both arms and terrorists. Legislating controls on Hizballah's arms needs to be in parallel with settling the Sheba, a Farms issue.

ADMITS ISOLATING AND
CONFRONTING HIZBALLAH AN OPTION

14. (C) Aoun admitted that these "solutions" won't be ready before the presidential elections but the president has to play a measurable role by working with the different parties to obtain the needed guarantees. In the end, he said, if Hizballah doesn't abide by the "solutions," Hizballah will have to be isolated and another "solution" found, which could be confrontation.

HIZBALLAH CAN BE CONTROLLED IN STAGES

15. (C) A/S Welch's reiterated the U.S. stance on Hizballah, and added that it would be the U.S. position to oppose a candidate for president who banked on a political alliance with terrorists or an outside power. Aoun said Hizballah represents one third of Lebanon's population, and thus cannot be ignored or isolated, except for Hizballah's military wing. Lebanon needs to make the non-military elements of Hizballah feel that they are not under threat from Israel, and not a target. When the government calls Hizballah terrorists, such statements undermine Shi'a confidence that the state will protect them. Such has been the situation for people in the south for the last 30 years. The UN is in the south, and now the LAF also, Aoun said, which helps reinforce Shi'a sentiments that the Shi'a are fully part of Lebanon.

16. (C) Aoun added that Hizballah's leaders are afraid that if they disarm, they will go to jail. He gave an example of rebels who traditionally feel that either they win or face the guillotine. Hence the logic for giving Hizballah guarantees rather than trying to coerce them which makes them more intransigent. Aoun stressed the longstanding Sunni)Shi'a conflict and his sensitivity to it. No one, he said, wants a confrontation, referring to the late January

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street and university incidents.

CATCH 22 ON THE TRIBUNAL AND PARLIAMENT

17. (C) Aoun claimed that he was the first to speak out in favor of the special tribunal and said it will help stop further killings. The Lebanese view of the judicial system would be strengthened if people were accused and tried. When challenged that he has been clear on his support of the tribunal but not on UNSC Chapter VII implementation of the tribunal, Aoun said he wanted to establish it through the Lebanese process. A discussion among the political parties is a necessary prerequisite, and Parliament has not been open to enable these discussions. Now, such discussions are no longer relevant. When asked if he knew of any objections to the tribunal, since the UNSYG legal advisor reported that no one in Lebanon had produced even one specific problem that could be discussed and dealt with, Aoun replied that all his MPs wanted the tribunal but decided not to discuss it since the Parliament wasn't open to have the discussions. When questioned why he didn't then ask for the Parliament to be opened, he again said that if Parliament had been opened, they would have voted in favor of it. Confronted on his passivity and told that taking a decision would be better, he declared his relations with the government were not very good and that this was not the first time in Lebanon's history that Parliament never officially opened.

18. (U) This message has been cleared by A/S Welch.
FELTMAN